**Water Features of the United States**

The United States has a number of important water features including oceans, rivers, lakes, and gulfs.  These bodies of water have many purposes.  They serve as borders for our nation, links between the eight geographic regions, and gateways to the rest of the globe.  Let’s learn more about these important water features and how they helped to shape the early history of the United States.



**Major Bodies of Water: Oceans**

The United States is located between two of Earth’s four oceans.  On its eastern border is the **Atlantic Ocean** and on its western border is the **Pacific Ocean**.  The Atlantic Ocean served as a watery highway for early explorers and settlers.  Later, immigrants from all over the world crossed the Atlantic to find a better life. The Pacific Ocean was also an early exploration destination.

**Major Bodies of Water: Rivers**

The major rivers of the United States include the **Ohio**, the **Mississipp**i, the **Missouri**, the **Columbia**, the **Colorado**, and the **Rio Grande**.  Like our two oceans, these six rivers played an important role in the history of this country.

The **Ohio**River, located in the Appalachian Mountain Region was the gateway to the west.  Early settlers used this river to begin a western migration from the colonies into the interior regions of the United States.

The **Mississippi**and **Missouri**Rivers, located west of the Appalachian Mountain region, were used to transport farm and industrial products.  They also served as links to other parts of the world.

The **Columbia** River, located in the northwestern corner of the United States, was traveled by Lewis and Clark as they explored the western territories from the Mississippi River west to the Pacific Ocean.

The **Colorado** River, located in the southwestern part of the United States, was traveled by the Spanish as they explored the southwestern United States.

The **Rio Grande** River, also located in the southwestern United States, forms our southern border with Mexico.

The **St. Lawrence** River, which forms part of the northeastern border with Canada, connects the Great Lakes to the Atlantic Ocean.

**Water Features of the United States**

***(continued)***

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**Major Bodies of Water: Gulf**

The **Gulf of Mexico,**which borders the Coastal Plain region on the south, also played an important role in the early history of the United States.  It provided the French and Spanish with exploration routes to Mexico and other parts of America.

**Major Bodies of Water: Lakes**

The **Great Lakes,** another major body of water in the United States, is a chain of five inland lakes. They include Lake Ontario, Lake Erie, Lake Huron, Lake Michigan, and Lake Superior.  This group of lakes is located within the Canadian Shield and Interior Lowlands regions of the United States.  Many important Midwestern port cities grew along the banks of these lakes making the Great Lakes a major transportation and shipping route.

